

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017**

My name is Tony Smith

I am a Senior Station Officer at Sunbury Fire Station, which is a CFA station in the outer metro North West area.

I have been an employee with CFA for the past 16 years, where I have achieved numerous qualifications as follows

- Crew leader
- Strike team leader
- EMR operator
- EMR supervisor
- Thermal imaging camera operator
- Ground observer
- Planning Officer
- As well as all required competencies of a qualified fire fighter

I have also received a chief's commendation for assisting in the rescue and resuscitation of a fire victim.

**I currently reside in** the town of Sunbury, this is also where I am stationed, prior to becoming a professional fire fighter I was also a volunteer FF at Sunbury F.S

**I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:**

Throughout my time with CFA I have seen the decline in volunteer response to fires and incidents in many areas, this has numerous reasons I believe:

- People now tend to spend more time with their families as they now travel further distances for work
- Shift work which allowed people the time to volunteer has seen a decline
- The commitment required in built up urban areas has become much greater with increased amount of call outs
- The skills set required of a volunteer have increased dramatically as the population of these once small towns has grown.
- Infrastructure in areas has outgrown the commitment that volunteers are able to provide.

I have seen this exasperate in my area over the last 5 years where we once would have up to 15-20 volunteers respond to a call, where as now we struggle with getting enough to fill a second appliance. (as I write this submission we had a call where out of 60 available volunteers we only had 5 respond).

This occurrence has become so regular, that I now have on some occasions felt the need to request an appliance from much further away just to ensure that I have not only enough FFs on scene but have enough with appropriate skills as not put my FFs safety at risk.

While I talk of safety it would be a opportune time to mention the safety of the community.

I say this as the current structure only allows for professional FFs to respond to one call at a time, if we are engaged at a fire call or incident under the current structure in place, if we were to receive a second call there is no guarantee that an appliance would be responded, sure ESTA would respond another appliance or brigade but they are only recognised as failing to respond after 64-8 min depending on the brigade and the area. This puts lives at risk. If the fire service is reformed into a modernised service this would not be the case as an appliance would be moved into the area to ensure a response to the community.

Having all professional fire fighters under one service allows for better inter-operability, which the communities are the winners as a result.

Volunteer FFs will continue to do what they do currently, which is provide assistance were they can with the skills they have developed in CFA.

However the larger urban communities require a much higher commitment and service from us FFs (both professional and volunteer), I honestly believe this can only be provided by bringing more professional FFs into larger urban areas and utilising CFA volunteers to provide the assistance when needed. Not to use the CFA volunteers as a primary fire fighting resource where the population has outgrown them.

I urge you as a committee to look at this reform in a favourable manor, as the winners from this are not anyone else but the Victorian communities which we so proudly serve.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Smith

Senior Station Officer

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